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ABSTRACT

It is extremely difficult to accomplish important goals and objectives today without widespread public support. The superintendent with his staff resources must present reading programs to the public in a manner which convinces the community that the programs are a vital and essential element in the accomplishment of educational goals. The key to the superintendent's success in organizing a reading program is his ability to use the cooperative efforts of his advisory committee in developing a district philosophy, in developing a planning program with long and short term goals, in selecting strategies for implementation which include adequate budget allocations for staffing and purchasing of materials, and in providing support for staff development and evaluation of the program. (WR)

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ORGANIZING FOR READING INSTRUCTION: 1

"The Role of the Superintendent"

The superintendent has many functions, but all are directed towards providing the best possible educational program in relation to available resources within the community.

The superintendent creates the conditions in which prople can get things done. These conditions are set up by development of general policies; policies that affect the existence of the school district, of the program. He must be an expert in bringing out the best in his staff. His position is probably one of the most difficult in public education. The superintendent, more than any other single person in the community, influences the shape of public education. Keep in mind the final decision rests with the superintendent before the program is passed to the Board of Education with his recommendation for official approval and action. (3)

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It is the responsibility of the superintendent to have the pulse of the community, be aware of changing conditions and values, involve the Board, community, staff, and students in establishment of educational goals. In some states educational goals have been set. There are many benefits in also having some type of priority or ranking of these goals in local communities.

Budgeting and staffing are major areas of concern to the superintendent. The preparation of the budget, the financial planning for support of one purpose and denial to another and staffing to meet the systems needs are crucial and critical decisions that affect the quality of education in a district. Added to the list of the superintendent's functions are physical plant construction and management, and transportation and purchase of materials.

In general, superintendents spend three quarters of their time on general policy development, staff-personnel administration, school-community relations, budgeting and financial planning and procurement of materials and equipment.[1] Of course the way these functions are implemented varies dependent on the size of the district, the type of district and the way responsibilities are delegated. The superintendent's time actually spent with teachers decreases as the size of the district increases.

Now let's look at the role of the superintendent in regard to organizing for reading instruction. It is the superintendent's responsibility to draw together teachers, specialists, and administrators in planning for reading instruction. All decisions which are to affect an entire school system should have the benefit of the knowledge and the experience of the person with the most comprehensive view of the total system. Using all the intelligence, insights, and understandings which can be pulled together in the district, the advisory committee with the superintendent should develop a philosophy for reading instruction.(2) In fact it is necessary to recognize as to whether or not the present staff is capable of proposing wise recommendations or whether it is necessary to employ an outside consultant with specific expertise to work with the advisory committee in planning the program. By providing leadership in matters such as these the superintendent influences the quality of the program.

Guidelines for choosing one philosophy over another must be identified. Consideration of available and projected resources must be noted.

One philosophy may be to employ reading specialists to work with students who have severe deficiencies or handicaps. Another philosophy may be to insure that class size remains reasonable and to train all teachers how to teach reading through inservice programs, with involvement and use of adequate materials. It has been reported that as much as one to five percent of student bodies may have severe reading disabilities; perhaps ten to twenty-five percent may have moderate problems with forty to sixty percent having mild problems. (4) Obviously these percentages vary depending on the make-up of the school district. It is rather generally agreed that mild problems in reading may be met in the classroom; moderate problems in small group sessions; and the severe problems attacked by a comprehensive team of staff members. This comprehensive team, our child study team, is made up of a psychologist, social worker, learning disability consultant, consulting psychiatrist and supplemental teachers.

Needless to say a needs assessment must be completed in the school district. In addition to reviewing test results, standardized as well as individual tests, the superintendent takes advantage of every possible feedback cycle in the district. Illustrative of such feedback cycles are the results of self studies in elementary, middle, and high schools; feedback from

the district curriculum council; feedback from faculty advisory council which reports directly to the superintendent, and his administrative council.

Once a philosophy has been developed all energies should be directed to planning the program. The superintendent as a catalyst fulfills his leadership responsibility by asking the searching questions and looking for teamwork and general agreement. In seeing the total picture of the school district he considers utilization of staff such as members of the child study team, supplemental teachers, media directors and specialists. Other goals identified in the district must also be considered in as much as they too will need consideration in budgeting and staffing. For example, hypothetically what about the agreement on the thrust for:

___ more individualization in the elementary school

___ additional open classrooms (with its many definitions)

___ how will the middle school concept of interdisciplinary team teaching affect the proposed reading program?

___ how will the use of multi-unit classes with differentiated staffing be effected?

___ how will the thrust of multi-media and multi-text affect the programs?

After considering the above questions as part of the planning in organizing the reading program, a time schedule or phases for implementation must be considered. Factors such as the timing of inservice programs, development in regard to utilization of staff, use of resource rooms, purchase of materials, and consideration to class size must be carefully thought out.

In my opinion the timing of inservice programs and the type of inservice is vitally important. Depending on the readiness for implementation of the program, inservice work may take place prior to the opening of school in the fall with a continuation during the school year. There are several ways in which a district may offer inservice work such as: planned inservice days during the school year; specific half-day programs; continuous programs each week offered at night for course and salary credit within the district; intensive training for a core of staff members who in turn, inservice the schools as a team over a specific period; and many others. It is important that the inservice include an overview of a balanced program (recreational, instructional, and study type materials); an overview of skills; identification of various materials available within the school, and how and when to use these materials.

Instruction in use of materials should include related changes in classroom management, various teaching strategies, and recognition of various learning styles of students. In too many situations teachers are motivated, directed, and encouraged to move into programs with theory and a goal but without the "how to". To be successful in encouraging individualization, small group instruction, use of learning centers, utilization of A.V. equipment and materials, team teaching, and multi-text materials and use of readability formulas, it is vitally important to communicate and demonstrate these concepts. As an example, it is one thing to encourage a diagnostic prescription type program for individualization, but be sure to train your teachers how to use the diagnostic tool, how to prescribe, and for what reason. If not, you have a frustrated and turned off teacher. Without specific training in these areas and an opportunity for the teacher to feed back problems and get some ongoing direction you may very well have all youngsters attempting to complete all the work at every learning center, regardless of type of material and level, poor record keeping or none at all, and of course no specific program other than keeping the kids going from one activity to the next and that won't last long.

In other words the inservice must be meaningful to the teacher, identify the teachers level of sophistication and relate your inservice to materials and resources immediately available to the teacher.

The school budget, prepared under the superintendent's supervision plays a vital role in the program and often indicates a degree of commitment to the program. Budget decisions call for balancing of many factors, as mentioned before. Financial support is directed to one purpose and many times must be denied to another. Decisions are carefully weighed in regard to variations in impact on the total school program. At times it may be necessary for the superintendent or a member of his central staff to counsel and work with a building principal in developing an adequate budget within his school. Keep in mind that needs of individual schools within a district may be considerably different. In the presentation of the role of the principal this may be discussed. Programs sometimes are best served when consideration is given to a multi-year plan.

Allocation of resources must be earmarked for evaluation. Evaluation must be planned and continuous. It should take place over a period of several years with ongoing feedback in order that identified weaknesses or gaps be filled. Tests,

including standardized, state and local are one factor in the evaluation process. Results should be viewed in groupings composed of adjacent grade levels in addition to single grade levels. Consideration should be given to what students are reading, how much and how often? Feedback should be encouraged from students who left the district for the field of work, and from those attending other levels of education.

Here is a model, a suggested program currently implemented for a school district with 4000 students, grades K-12.

In the elementary schools, class size was reduced to twenty to twenty-five students in grades kindergarten through grade four with each teacher then having the opportunity to individualize instruction.

An instructional media center was developed in each school with ample supplies and equipment for classroom use as well.

Funds were allocated to develop an inservice program on the teaching of reading for primary teachers. Their needs were the basis for follow up with individual help. Most teachers receive one or possibly two reading courses in college and this seems to be insufficient. In addition, inservice courses are available for teachers on individualizing instruction, use of programs as well as administering an informal reading inventory which is to be used by each teacher, grades one through six.

Procedures were established for referring severely handicapped youngsters to the child study team.

For the middle school and high school levels, inservice programs for all teachers were developed. In addition, a working guide which identifies specific reading skills at all levels was developed. This is labeled a working guide because the format is to encourage teacher reactions and suggestions as a basis for ongoing revision. Included in the guide are reading skills, teaching strategies, organizational suggestions, identified areas of a balanced reading program, and readability factors. The format identifies the skills, suggested behavioral objectives, activities, with columns for additional teacher input. The guide for teacher use on the high school level includes an informal reading survey. Recent efforts in the district to improve the reading program have made secondary teachers more aware and more sensitive to the readability level of materials and the instructional level of the youngsters.

Another aspect of the total effort is the function of the reading specialist. The job description for the reading specialist in the middle school and high school level is specific. It is to work directly with teachers, give demonstration lessons, and work with handicapped students in a personalized program considering their readiness, instructional and independent level.

In addition to their duties the reading specialist has the responsibility to: (1) make available an independent reading program with a schedule and post hole evaluations and conferences for all students (able, average, and handicapped); (2) motivate and challenge each one and make them aware of the importance of reading toward better achievement. The purpose is to develop the reading habit with all staff members and students. The superintendent is able to support this type of program, improve upon it, and share the positive results with the community.

It is extremely difficult to accomplish important goals and objectives today without widespread public support. The superintendent with his staff resources must present the program to the public in a manner which convinces the community that the program is a vital and essential element towards accomplishing educational goals. In brief then, the success of organizing a reading program in regard to the superintendent role, is the ability to use the cooperative efforts of his advisory committee in developing a district philosophy, a planning program with long and short term goals, selecting strategies for implementation which include adequate budget allocations for staffing and purchasing of materials, support for staff development and evaluation of the program.

As one writer (3) has noted, for the superintendent as for the teacher, the exhilaration of his work is in the constant pursuit of a vital objective - the best possible education for every student. He is stimulated too, by the process of helping to hammer out school policies and budgets in the fire of conflicting community opinions and interests. He takes pleasure in helping to educate the public to the needs of education. Reading is the foundation for a quality school program. Support it and demand results.

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